

Racial harassment suit

■ **Two correction officers** allege slurs at Nassau jail

■ **Complaint against sheriff** cites abuse, retaliation

BY WILLIAM MURPHY
bill.murphy@newsday.com

Two correction officers at the Nassau County jail in East Meadow charged yesterday they have been subjected to racial slurs and harassment at work because they are African-American and, after complaining, were ignored or faced retaliation.

Mary Williams, a 14-year veteran, and Jonathan Wharton, a 27-year veteran, made their claims at a news conference with their attorney Frederick Brewington, who filed a \$30 million federal lawsuit yesterday in U.S. District Court in Central Islip on behalf of Williams.

Brewington also released a copy of a complaint filed Thursday with the State Division of Human Rights on behalf of Wharton, who said he faced harassment after winning a federal lawsuit against the sheriff's department.

A spokesman for Nassau County declined to comment on Williams' lawsuit against four employees and the sheriff's department, which runs the jail, or Wharton's complaint.

"These two officers share a common bond," Brewington



Mary Williams says a swastika and the letters "KKK" were carved into a door frame at her workplace. ■ Video: newsday.com/nassau

said. "They have been humiliated, harassed and abused in the workplace by a co-worker and when they complained their department has refused . . . to investigate, refused and failed to do anything to help them and refused to correct the situation."

Williams said she was distressed by a swastika and the letters "KKK" she found etched in a door frame of the medical

office where she worked.

The markings Williams saw in September 2014 were in an area open only to employees. She said her supervisors did not conduct an investigation after she complained.

Instead, Williams said, her work hours were changed, making it difficult to care for a daughter with medical problems. The suit demands Williams be re-

turned to her former shift.

The state human rights office found in May that there was probable cause to believe Williams had been the victim of unlawful discrimination, paving the way for yesterday's lawsuit.

She said two days after she filed a complaint, Sheriff Michael Sposato issued an order reminding employees they should not show hostility toward any individual or group. But Williams' lawsuit claims "no one has been subject to disciplinary actions for the racially offensive etchings."

Wharton said he was subjected to retaliation after a jury awarded him \$420,000 for his claim he was disciplined for filing a discrimination complaint against the sheriff's department. After winning the lawsuit, Wharton expected the discrimination would end, he said.

"It has not stopped," Wharton said. "It has gotten worse and more blatant."

Upon returning to work after the verdict, Wharton said, he found a caricature of a black man above his desk with dollar signs circling the face.

"I have been threatened, cursed at, called a skid, all because of my race," Wharton said. A "skid" is a reference to an inmate, he said.

Brewington said Williams and Wharton worked in "a highly-charged, sensitive area and cannot depend on people who are doing things like this."

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